

**Remarks of
J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board Member
Susan Ness**

**JEFFERSON FORUM
U.S. Ambassador's Residence
Bern, Switzerland**

**Tuesday, October 18, 2011
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**

Thank you, Ambassador Beyer and Megan Beyer, for so graciously organizing a Jefferson Forum this evening.

I am especially grateful that the topic of the Jefferson Forum this evening is the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Program. Thomas Jefferson would have loved the Fulbright program. President Jefferson, who founded the University of Virginia, enjoyed the company of the brightest minds in every field of endeavor, and valued international perspectives.

As a new member of the Fulbright Board, I am honored to be with you. The Board currently has ten private citizen members, appointed by the President, to oversee and set policy for the Fulbright Scholarship Program.

I look forward to learning from those of you who are current or past Fulbright grantees how that experience has impacted your life.

Although I did not participate in the Fulbright Program myself, I know from personal experience how enriching and life-changing studying abroad can be. 43 years ago, I spent my junior year in college in Geneva, Switzerland, taking courses at the l'Institut des Hautes Études Internationales and researching the political, social and economic impact of multinational countries like Switzerland.

It was an extraordinary year. I traveled throughout your beautiful country – visiting every canton -- to understand how such a geographically compact nation can so harmoniously accommodate three official and four national languages.

And I was fortunate to be in Uri at the time of a Landsgemeinde – when all of the men of the canton gathered together to vote on the issues of the day. I asked one young man my age how he felt about women not having the right to vote in cantonal elections. He replied, “If women had the right to vote, who would stay home with all of the children and cows while we voted?” Another responded – “if women voted, they would just cancel our votes, so what’s the point?”

Of course today Swiss women not only have the right to vote, Switzerland even has had a woman serve as its president.

Another quick story from my time in Switzerland. As you may recall, the 1968-69 academic year saw turmoil on many college campuses around the world. Students in Paris took to the streets. And even here in Switzerland, students at the Université de Genève protested in their own unique way. They occupied the Provost’s office for three days until they reached an agreement with the Administration. Then they quietly left --- and the next day, they returned -- to clean up!!

Those of you here tonight who are past and current Fulbright grantees are part of a **global community of more than 310,000 Fulbright alumni** from the United States and 155 other countries. Among your community are presidents, poets, Nobel Laureates, artists, ambassadors, teachers, scientists, journalists, entrepreneurs, economists, financiers, and cabinet officials.

They include such notables as the kidney transplant surgeon, Samuel Kountz; Academy Award-winning actor John Lithgow; poet and author Maya Angelou; the current president of Chile, Sebastian Piñera; the Nobel Prize-winning economist from Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus; and — Switzerland’s own — Google senior executive, Urs Hölzle.

Sixty-five years ago, freshman U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright envisioned “a modest program with an immodest aim.” He believed that not only education -- but also educational and cultural **exchange** -- were essential to advancing peace and international cooperation. He championed a simple concept to foster mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Cooperation is at the heart of the Fulbright Program. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, oversees the program under policy guidelines set by the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. While the primary source of funding for the Fulbright Program is an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress, participating governments and host country institutions, corporations and foundations provide nearly half of the support.

This cost-sharing model is unique in the U.S. government, and it reflects the value of educational exchange for United States and our partner countries.

The U.S.-Swiss Fulbright Program is a vital part of U.S.-Swiss relations. Indeed, twelve years ago, the U.S. Ambassador and the Swiss Foreign Minister agreed to strengthen the program, adding, private-sector donations to US and Swiss government funding.

In January 2000, the U.S. Ambassador and the Rector of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich established the “**Friends of Fulbright**” - a private association to accept private-sector donations.

Since then, some 30 individuals and corporate sponsors have generously underwritten scholarships. These donors — and **all** the Friends of Fulbright — **have** earned our heartfelt thanks.

A high priority of the Department of State and the Fulbright Board is increasing diversity in the Program – to make the Fulbright opportunity more accessible – especially for people from underserved communities, and for those wanting to immerse themselves in underserved communities abroad.

We seek – and receive – applications from outstanding candidates from all ethnic, socio-economic, geographic and institutional backgrounds, including persons with disabilities. Applications have risen to record levels. In Switzerland, the Fulbright outreach encompasses linguistic and cantonal diversity.

The Program constantly is evolving to honor its core purpose while responding to global concerns and the aspirations of each new generation. For example, the State Department has created a host of new seminars for international Fulbrighters: on **Diversity and Conflict Resolution**; on **Democracy and Human Rights**; and on **Food and Energy Sustainability**. It also hosted two seminars called “**From Lab to Market**” to enable 200 Fulbright students to translate their scientific knowledge into innovative products and services to improve lives in their home countries. The State Department also sponsors nine annual seminars for more than 1,000 foreign Fulbright students on a key topic, such as **Social Entrepreneurship** or **Environmental Protection**.

While technology cannot replace the human dimension of Fulbright’s person-to-person international exchange, the Program has amplified its impact through its social media outreach campaign. Through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube, we connect with more prospective applicants each day. The Fulbright Board recently launched our own Twitter feed -- so please follow us at **@FulbrightBoard**.

Of course, Fulbrighters themselves are the program’s best advocates. For example, U.S. Fulbright student **Kristina Yancey** was featured on the Mobility International USA website, in part, for her ongoing video blog about her experiences conducting research on nuclear reactor design at the Paul Scherrer Institute near Zurich Switzerland.

In a less technological age – many years ago - Senator Fulbright offered comments that still ring true. He said, “The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy, the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see.”

In that spirit, I will conclude by issuing a challenge from the Fulbright Board to all Fulbrighters past, present and future: Be a leader - be a good listener – be a credible voice for positive change and be a productive collaborator.

Thank you.

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